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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005931

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR PRM AND NEA, GENEVA FOR RMA, USUN FOR ECOSOC

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [OPDC](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [JO](#) [UNRWA](#)

SUBJECT: NEW UNRWA COMGEN OUTLINES HER GAZA DISENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

REF: STATE 127444

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: UNRWA's new Commissioner-General (ComGen) is modifying her agency's Gaza disengagement response plans as a result of meetings she has had with PA President Abbas and with Quartet Special Envoy for Disengagement James Wolfensohn since her appointment. In an introductory July 20 meeting with the Charge, she said she had used her initial meeting with President Abbas to signal her growing concern that militant violence could force her to evacuate staff from Gaza. However, she assured us that she wants to avoid repeating last year's extended evacuation of UNRWA's Gaza HQ to Jerusalem and has no current plans to approve such a relocation, despite the two-hour kidnapping of an Amcit activist and fatal shooting of two settlers July 23-24. That said, the ComGen is likely to permanently assign her yet-to-be-identified Deputy to Jerusalem to promote closer cooperation with the Wolfensohn team and the PA officials engaged in Gaza post-disengagement planning. Asked about the status of UNRWA's emergency food, job creation and housing programs in Gaza, the ComGen conceded that the recent settler protests had delayed UNRWA's plans to break ground on a Saudi-funded Rafah housing project but she was confident her agency would have sufficient freedom of movement to complete an ongoing July-August emergency food distribution for approximately 850,000 individuals in the Gaza Strip. She is appealing to the IDF to extend the hours it is prepared to facilitate the movement of UN agencies during disengagement to ensure UNRWA can offload a USG-funded September-November distribution round scheduled to arrive in Ashdot Port in mid-August. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Charge delivered the Secretary's congratulatory message (reftel) to Karen Abu Zayd, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)'s new ComGen, at UNRWA's Amman HQ July 20. Abu Zayd had met Palestinian Authority President Abass earlier that day and briefed the Charge on changes she is contemplating making to UNRWA's Gaza disengagement strategy as result of that meeting and other discussions she has held with Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn since her appointment.

RELOCATING SENIOR STAFF TO JERUSALEM TO SUPPORT WOLFENSOHN

¶3. (C) Abu Zayd told Charge that she had hoped to use her first post-appointment meeting with Abu Mazen (July 20) to discuss UNRWA's potential role in the post-disengagement Gaza development programs, as well as her obligation to review staff security in light of the recent up tic in militant violence. However, security dominated her discussion after Abu Mazen told her flatly that the PA "can only manage to focus on security now." Abu Zayd indicated that she is concerned that the current levels of violence could force her to repeat the decision her predecessor made last year to temporarily re-locate UNRWA's Gaza HQ to Jerusalem, but stressed that she wanted to avoid evacuating UNRWA staff. In a subsequent July 24 telcon with refcoord, Abu Zayd confirmed that she has decided to maintain her agency's current Gaza staffing, noting that there was strong staff support at an internal July 22 UNRWA Security Management Committee meeting she chaired to remain in Gaza. She noted that she had also taken this decision in close consultation with the UN's Department of Safety and Security following the two-hour kidnapping of an Amcit activist in the Gaza Strip and fatal shooting of two Israeli nationals near the Abu Kholi junction July 23-24.

¶4. (C) However, Abu Zayd suggested that she is planning to assign her yet-to-be-named Deputy ComGen to Jerusalem for six months, if not on a permanent basis, to ensure that UNRWA has consistent senior-level coordination with the Wolfensohn team and the PA. On the ComGen Deputy search, she told the Charge that she and UN SYG Chef de Cabinet Mark Malloch Brown had agreed to finalize a Deputy UNRWA ComGen short list before July 26, and explained that identifying a candidate who could improve UNRWA's funding situation would be the driving factor in her selection. Indeed, she revealed that she had already rejected two qualified internal candidates in favor of an

outside candidate from the Gulf, Europe or Japan that would be more likely to spur additional voluntary contributions. (NOTE: In a follow-up July 24 telcon, Abu Zayd told refcoord that her staff had consulted several regional governments over the last week, but had been unsuccessful in identifying an Arab candidate. Without offering names, she said her current short list consisted of four candidates from Japan, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. She thought it unlikely that her deputy would be appointed ahead of disengagement, as only two of these four candidates had definite interest in the position, and only the Japanese candidate had the clear support of his government. END NOTE.)

15. (C) In addition to re-locating her Deputy, Abu Zayd told refcoord June 24 that she will likely re-assign the agency's Director of Operations to Amman to "force that individual to work with all of UNRWA's fields and programs" but suggested that she would not force current Gaza Field Director/Director of Operations Lionel Brisson to relinquish his operations role before he is scheduled to retire later this year.

DISRUPTIONS TO GAZA EMERGENCY PROGRAMMING

16. (SBU) Abu Zayd told refcoord July 24 that she used a July 21 meeting with Major General Yossef Mishlev to formally request that the IDF extend its plan to facilitate the movement of UN and other aid workers from 6 p.m. on Friday to 6 p.m. Sunday during disengagement by an additional three hours on Fridays to help UNRWA avoid a break in its emergency food pipeline this fall. (NOTE: UNRWA needs to offload a September-November food distribution scheduled to arrive in Ashdot Port in August. END NOTE) Asked about UNRWA's current access to the Gaza Strip and its impact on its emergency food, job creation and housing projects, Abu Zayd said that recent settler protests had forced UNRWA to postpone a July 18 ceremony to lay the cornerstone of their Saudi-funded emergency Rafah re-housing project. However, she was confident that UNRWA's ongoing July-August emergency food distribution (to approximately 145,000 households) would not be disrupted "for more than 48 hours at time" -- despite the fact that UNRWA is still facing the potential logistical problem of transporting food from its warehouses in Gaza City and Rafah to four camps located between the Abu Khali and Netzarim junctions in central Gaza that are particularly vulnerable to closure.

RECONSTRUCTION - UNRWA RAMPING UP MICRO-CREDIT LENDING

17. (SBU) Finally, Abu Zayd noted that UNRWA is preparing to use current funding to ramp up its micro-finance and housing projects in Gaza to support Wolfensohn's Rapid Action Plan. She explained that UNRWA has USD 15 million to implement its new 2005-2009 Medium Term Plan, and had decided to allocate it evenly to its five fields, noting that that decision had been well-received by senior Jordanian and Syrian officials concerned the agency would divert resources to Gaza. Abu Zayd added that Wolfensohn had encouraged UNRWA to submit additional, longer-term reconstruction projects in the areas of micro-credit, camp development and education to his team this month. (NOTE: UNRWA's External Relations Director backbriefed USAID West Bank/Gaza and regional refcoord on the reconstruction projects it has submitted to the Wolfensohn team (matrix emailed to PRM) in Tel Aviv, July 21. END NOTE.)

18. (U) This message was cleared by Embassy Tel Aviv and Consulate General Jerusalem.
HALE